

THE ANATOMY OF THOMAS GEMINUS

A Notable Acquisition for the Library

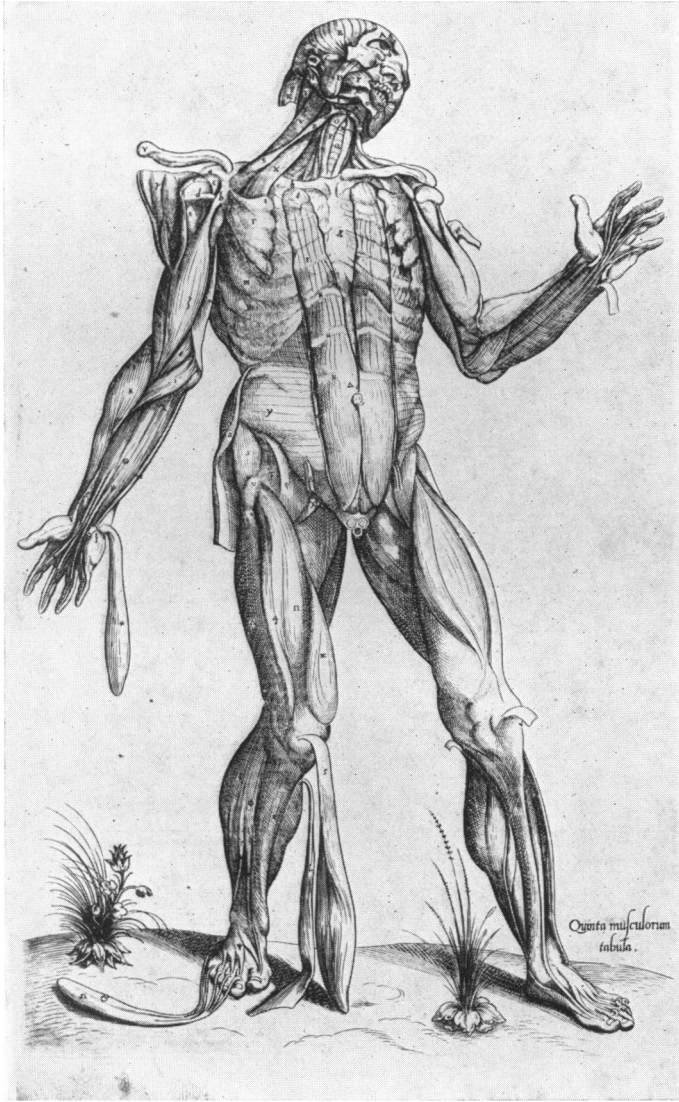
By

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Honorary Librarian of the College

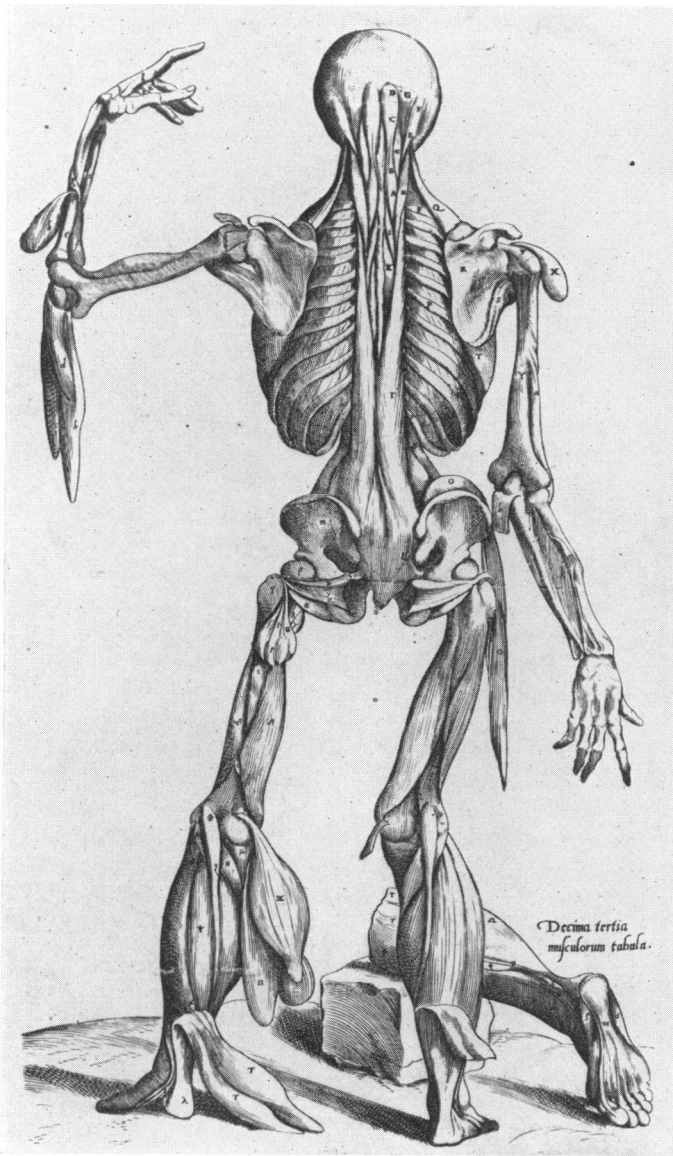
De humani corporis fabrica, the famous anatomy book by Andreas Vesalius, was published in Basel as a large folio in 1543. A second edition was published twelve years later, in 1555, but already in 1546 Vesalius was complaining in the course of his *China Root Epistle* that his book was being plagiarised in England, "where the figures of my *Epitome* have been copied very poorly and without skill in drawing—although not without expense to whomever will have to pay for them." The *Epitome* of Vesalius's *Fabrica*, first published in 1543, was a greatly abbreviated form of the folio—a dissecting room edition as it were, with nine of the the splendid figures slightly enlarged and accompanied only by a brief description. It was this *Epitome* that had been adapted, to the annoyance of Vesalius, for the English market by an enterprising publisher under the name Thomas Geminus. This pirated work contained forty engraved copper-plates copied from the wood engravings of the *Fabrica*, preceded by an engraved title-page containing the arms of Henry VIII and with a large folding plate of nude male and female figures also copied from the *Epitome*. The accompanying text is derived from the *Epitome*, the title given to the piracy being: *Compendiosa totius Anatomie delineatio aere exarata*. The plates, notwithstanding the criticisms of Vesalius, are executed with considerable skill, though they were the first copper-plate engravings ever to be executed and printed in England.

Geminus was formerly thought to have been an Italian named Gemini, but he has recently (*Brit. med. J.* 1953 2, 150) been identified with a Flemish refugee, Thomas Lambrit or Lambert. This man began his career as a publisher in England by collaborating with Thomas Raynald in producing *The byrth of Mankinde, otherwise named the Womans booke* in 1545. The *Compendiosa totius Anatomie delineatio* also appeared in 1545, having been printed for Geminus by John Herford. This enterprise was successful, and it is suggested in Harvey Cushing's *Bio-bibliography of Vesalius*, 1943, that it was Dr. John Caius who persuaded Geminus to follow it up by publishing his anatomy book in English. This has not been confirmed by the researches of Professor C. D. O'Malley in his study of Geminus recently published: O'Malley points out that Geminus himself claims to have been commissioned to produce these copper-plates by King Henry VIII. The publisher used the same engraved title-page as before with the date, 1553, added after the imprint. According to his preface he called in Nicholas Udall, a well known scholar and former head master of Eton College, to make a translation. In fact, however, Udall translated only the *Characterum indices* and contributed a short address



“ To the ientill readers and Surgeons of England ”. The text of the book was not a translation of the Latin Geminus. It was printed by “ Nycholas Hyll dwellynge in Saynte John’s Street,” and was similar to that used by Thomas Vicary in his *Anatomie of the bodie of man*, 1548, this having been translated from an earlier manuscript by Henri de Mondeville (d. 1320). The English Geminus was, therefore, virtually a new book, combining Vesalian illustrations with a version of an early text by a Frenchman

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rearranged to follow the order of the *Anatomia* of Mondino, 1478. The Latin Geminus of 1545 and the English edition of 1553 were the first illustrated text books of anatomy to be published in this country and the forty illustrations were printed from the first copper-plates to be executed here.

This brief account of the *Compendiosa delineatio* of Thomas Geminus, distilled mainly from the pages of Cushing's *Bio-bibliography of Vesalius*, is concerned with a series of the rarest and most valuable anatomical text books that are known. The library of the Royal College of Surgeons was already provided with several of them, namely the *Fabrica* of 1543 and 1555, the *Epitome* of 1543 (acquired by purchase only in 1949) and the Latin Geminus of 1545. By great good fortune the College has now (May 1959) been able to acquire the rarest of them all, the English Geminus of 1553. Cushing records seven copies, five of which are in the United States of America and two in England. The English copies are in the British Museum and in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, though this one is a variant issue without a date on the title-page. Three others, unrecorded by Cushing, are in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (with undated title-page), William Hunter's Library at the University of Glasgow, and Leeds University Library. Mr. W. R. LeFanu informs me that only two incomplete copies have appeared in the London sale rooms since 1902, when records of sales were first published. The copy now in the library of the College was acquired through the good offices of Sir Hugh Lett from the estate of the late William Henry Newton, M.R.C.S., of Walmer, who died in December 1958. Like several other copies, it lacks the folding plate of the nude figures known as "Adam and Eve." In the *Epitome* of Vesalius the male figure holds a skull in his left hand: in the Geminus plate an apple is substituted for the skull, which is now depicted on the ground between the figures with a serpent issuing from the *foramen ovale*. Other lesser defects are the loss of the lower outer corner of the engraved title-page and the absence of one leaf (signature I 5) with duplication of the succeeding leaf, this being an original binder's error. The book possesses, however, the very unusual virtue of still having its original English calf binding decorated with panels blind-stamped with rolls in three tiers*. Gilt tooling was not yet being done in England in 1553. The volume is, in fact, in the state known to bibliographers as "unsophisticated," and the minimum of repairs has been executed by John Gray and Son of Cambridge.

The earlier history of the volume is not known nor through what channels it came into the possession of Dr. Newton. The fly-leaf before the title-page carries, however, a most interesting record in the form of a nearly contemporary (1609) doctor's register of his patients with their complaints and treatments. This will be transcribed and published later.

Opportunities of acquiring books of this quality are few indeed, and the College is greatly indebted to Sir Hugh Lett for his kindness in arranging the purchase.

* Two of these rolls are to be identified in Oldham's *English Blind-stamped Bindings*, Cambridge 1952, as: (I) at the edges, No. 635, FC.h.(4); (II) in the median position, No. 786, HM.a.(17). (III) In the innermost position is a roll which Mr. Oldham tells us is unknown to him and hitherto unrecorded; it resembles, but with considerable variation, his No. 849, HM.h.(24).

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Bibliographical description

GEMINUS. Anatomy, English edition, London 1553.

Engraved title: COMPENDIOSA / totius Anatomie delineatio, aere / exarata : per Thomam Geminum. / LONDINI. 1553.

Colophon: Imprynted at London by Nycholas Hyll dwellynge / in Saynte Johns streate, for Thomas Geminus.

Collation: fo. [*]₂, A₆, B₇, C-I₆, K₂; 59 leaves, 40 plates; 390 × 285 mm. The leaves are not paginated, and the plates not numbered continuously.

Contents: [*]_{1a} engraved title; [*]_{1b} blank; [*]_{2a} dedication to King 'Edwarde the VI' [who died 6 July 1552]; [*]_{2b} Epistle by the translator, Nicholas Udall, 'To the ientill readers and Surgeons of Englande', dated 'Windesore, 20 July 1552' [that is, a fortnight after the death of the King to whom the book is dedicated]; A_{1a}-K_{2a} text of 'treatyse of Anatomie'; the plates are inserted through the text.

Note: This copy lacks leaf I₅, but has I₆ in duplicate; plate [25], before F₄, is in the second state; the folding plate following B₂ is wanting.

Leaf I₅ has now been supplied from another, fragmentary, copy of the book.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SURGICAL COLLEGES

A MEETING of the International Federation of Surgical Colleges was held in Munich on 15th and 16th September, under the chairmanship of Sir Harry Platt, Bt., F.R.C.S.

Working parties were set up to examine the following problems with which the Federation proposes to concern itself:

- (a) Surgical Missions
- (b) Training of Surgeons
- (c) Surgical Research
- (d) The interchange of Young Surgeons

The following new members were elected: College of Surgeons of Poland, Association of Surgeons of India, Association Française de Chirurgie, Societe Hellenique de Chirurgie, Austrian Surgical Society, Swiss Surgical Association.

The representative of the Polish College of Surgeons was elected to fill a vacancy on the Executive Committee.

An open meeting was held, at which papers were read on the topic *International cooperation by means of sending surgical missions to countries in need of them*. A report of this meeting will be published at a later date.

It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the Federation in London in October, 1960.